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His Fame Lives On

In the 30 years since his death, Grant Wood and his art have remained vigorously alive in the public consciousness and in art history.

His works—the oils, the drawings, the lithographs and all—still are sought after eagerly, some of them bringing prices unheard of at the time they were done. Museums have acquired his paintings and he is now represented in many of America's leading art repositories.

As an example, there is the well-known satirical and humorous oil, "Daughters of Revolution." Originally owned by Edward G. Robinson, the actor, it was later purchased by Aristotle Onassis, the Greek shipping magnate. Now it seemingly has a permanent home with its purchase by the Cincinnati Art Museum.

Many exhibits of Grant Wood's work have been held throughout the country in the years since his death. Such shows remain extremely popular with the public. Efforts to hold a retrospective exhibition of his art last year at the University of Arizona went for naught, however, because so many owners of the major paintings were reluctant to loan them due to their increasing value and their fragility.

Grant Wood and Iowa have been synonymous terms in many parts of the world for three decades or more. The mention of one has suggested the other to people in other states and lands. In many cases, whatever knowledge people have had of Iowa has come from their familiarity with Wood's landscapes.

Thus the world has come to know of the rolling prairie land and fertile fields of eastern Iowa, and of their customs, through the stylized landscapes and meticulous portraits that Wood has painted.

It is generally conceded that the durability of Wood's art is due to his universal themes. At the time of his death, an editorial in the *Detroit (Michigan) News* said in part: "What made Grant Wood an outstanding figure in American painting was the number of people, and the variety of them, who felt his art had something for them. He communicated to thousands a great deal of what he felt about places and people we have lived in and with, and his appeal was as nearly universal as that of any American painter of this century."

Wood is the only artist in the history of Iowa ever to gain a pre-eminence in the art world and a secure place in the history of American painting. While the state has produced many highly recognized artists, none has ever, up to now, achieved the world attention that came to Grant Wood during his lifetime and since his death.

Wood himself was to experience only 12 years

of fame. He was 39 when "American Gothic" made him world famous in 1930 and he died in 1942. But in those 12 years, his creative genius and originality produced painting after painting that brought renewed acclaim.

After nearly 42 years, Wood's masterpiece "American Gothic," now in the collection of the Chicago Art Institute, has become a phenomenon in the art world. It has been called the most famous American painting of the century.

Recording a fabulous history of its own through the years, it is now an American folkpiece, deeply entrenched in this country's culture.

It has become the most caricatured painting of all time. Parodies of it have appeared constantly for years in advertisements, in movies and on magazine covers. Take-offs of the painting have been common in greeting cards for all occasions—even in early 1972 on a Valentine card.

The two figures in the painting have been favorites with political cartoonists, whose cartoons appear on editorial pages in newspapers and magazines. One, a lampoon of the then President of the United States and his wife decorated the cover of a record album. Other presidents have been used in parodies of the painting.

In the late 1960's, this painting became familiar to a third generation when children came to know it through a cornflakes commercial on television with the two parodied characters talking.

The "American Gothic hairdo" was proclaimed in 1970 and gaunt faces sometimes are described as "American Gothic faces." Journalist C. L. Sulzberger once described Premier Golda Meir of Israel as looking like "a benevolent Grant Wood farmer's wife."

In November, 1970, the Museum of Art at the University of Iowa, held an exhibit devoted entirely to the popular uses made of this Wood painting. Entitled "Through the Years With American Gothic," this exhibit was taken over by the Iowa Arts Council with showings scheduled throughout Iowa for most of 1972.

Plans now are underway to restore the original "American Gothic" house at Eldon, Iowa, as a public attraction and historical landmark.

There was a tendency for years to lump Artists Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, and John Steuart Curry together as "regionalists" because each dealt in subject matter close to his own surroundings but with nothing else in common. This inclination has subsided and the three artists usually are classed as American Scene painters in art history books of recent years.

Grant Wood was first and last an Iowan. He lived all of his life in eastern Iowa, residing near Anamosa, and in Cedar Rapids and Iowa City. He found complete satisfaction and continuing inspiration close at home and in the people around him. He once admitted that he had to go to France

to appreciate Iowa, referring to the four trips he made to Europe in the 1920's when he was struggling to master his own style.

Grant Wood public schools are common now in Iowa, an honor that surely would have pleased this native son since he himself had served as an Iowa schoolteacher for several years early in his career.

EDWIN B. GREEN